

PRAGMATICS OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: AN ANALYSIS OF SELECTED OBASANJO'S LETTERS

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Abstract

The study investigates the role of language in civic engagement and demonstrates how language is used as a viable tool to propel civic actions. Hence, it focused on the locution and illocutionary acts of Obasanjo's letters to two presidents in Nigeria. Sixty sentences were selected from three open letters. The findings showed that the overall relative frequency percentages are: commissive 15%, assertive 20%, directive 48.3%, declarative 6.7%, and expressive 10%. Results show that Obasanjo, in his letters relied more on sentences that performed directive acts more than other speech acts. However, in his letters to Buhari, he used sentences with assertive acts more than he used in his letter to Jonathan. Hence, the data is characterized by a preponderance of directive, assertive and commissive acts as rhetoric strategies. The study confirms that language use in political discourse is rarely neutral. It further demonstrates that civic engagement drivers manipulate language to influence political decisions and reconstruct public opinion by propelling certain actions or inactions.

1. INTRODUCTION

Language use in civic engagement is an instrument of power and inherently political. It is intimately entwined with questions of group identity, status, and citizenship. In the light of political events in Nigeria and other democracies, negotiating the language of belonging and citizenship are as contested as ever. Language, literacy, power, individuals, and nations are all taken up in the context of civic engagement. Therefore, the complexity of communication and location of the intended meaning might be difficult outside shared meaning and context. In other words, meaning implications in the civic discourse under review would be incomplete without examining how language is used and packaged concerning power, society, and context. This, therefore, accounts for the insufficiency of sole reliance on the surface meaning of words for deriving meaning and analyzing intended messages in political discourse such as letters.

Civic engagement is related to citizenship, where citizenship entails meaningful membership in a community and not just formal citizenship to the nation-state (Kassimir & Flanagan, 2010). The concept of civic engagement has assumed an important status as a means to moderate the surging trend of individualism and rapid erosion of communal living. It is a medium through which public interest and social life are critically engaged in a political atmosphere. Although stakeholders accept the legitimacy of governing institutions yet seek to use their influence as conduits for promoting democratic health. This is demonstrated in the linguistic construct of Obasanjo's civic letters to sitting presidents in Nigeria which is the focus of this research. Key politicians like Olusegun Obasanjo have overtime assumed a major political vibrato shaping and reshaping the decisions of many

Nigerians. This political vibration oftentimes reaches its crescendo influencing the political *ship* and *captain* of the nation's democracy. Civic engagement through deliberately scripted letters by Obasanjo has in the recent past influenced the political will of Nigerians, reconditioned reformative craving, and generated a political reawakening that influenced the poll. It has both rebirth and reformed a trend of surging political culture with clear landmarks. The intersection of civic engagement, language, and context is significant to the interpretation of the letters under examination in this study. They are not just words but tools intended to perform certain functions.

Words shape our world and our *shape* is being formed by our words. The words we use in speech or writing convey a great deal of information about us. They could be suggestive of our social status, influence, age, sex, and motives. The emotional proximity, attachment or detachment, thoughtfulness, or shallowness of the speaker/writer can be diagnosed through the choice of words. Words are meaningful markers and occasional mediators of natural, social, and personality processes. Ricoeur F., (1976) argued that the ways we describe events define the meanings of the events and that these meanings help us keep our grasp on reality. Similar assumptions are implicit in much of the work in sociolinguistics (Tannen 1994), discourse analysis, and communication research. However, this present study explores words used in context rather than language per se. The distinction is that language use in scripted civic engagement could be described to make use of subtle, seemingly passive remarks across divisive lines including psychological, socio-cultural, and ethnic parameters to achieve pragmatic effects. Since words drive the will and wheel of the human mind, this study would examine speeches as action propellers in political discourse.

1.1 Statement of the Research Problem

A close reading of several research works has revealed that previous studies perceive civic engagement as both a linguistic and political subject (Opeibi, 2012; Dada, 2004; Grundy, 2000). This is so because language is a critical tool for packaging political messages as well as steering social actions. In the global space, language has been highly manipulated, deliberately used to inform, misinform, market, de-market and propagate certain philosophical, social, and political orientations. In Africa especially, civic engagement is gradually becoming a norm as electorates and political participants seem to wake up to the reality of intellectual activism. The interest in civic discourse and outcomes with particular reference to Nigeria makes Obasanjo's letters very critical to this study. Good governance and civic engagement in a young democracy such as Nigeria brings to the fore, the relevance of political documents (letters) in examining how language can be used to influence decisions and motivate change. The pragmatic relevance of this study lies in the illocutionary force behind the words used in the letters, the psychological weight it bears, and the social impact on stakeholders. This study, therefore, demonstrates that words perform certain actions, especially when deliberately packaged with political intents.

1.2 Research Aim and Objectives

The aim is to enable us to understand how language is used in civic engagement and the extent to which linguistic skills in information packaging can influence political decisions. The objectives of this study are to;

- . investigate the role of language in civic engagement and demonstrate how language is used as a viable tool for propelling civic actions
- . adopt speech acts theory to analyze the content and context of the letters

1.3 Scope of the Study

This study is an investigation of the language of civic engagement from the communication point of view in terms of linguistic actions and context. The focus will be on language use, pragmatics, and speech acts. This study would examine the thematic outline and illocutionary acts of the letters to justify the data collected. The functions of the speech acts in the study are also captured to achieve objectivity. The choice of letters is due to the impact of civic writings experimented with the Jonathan administration as well as the socio-political influence of Obasanjo as a former military leader and president of Nigeria.

1.4 Significance of the Study

Language use has always been central in politics and democratic practices. This study could provide information on issues of language use in civic engagement and linguistic pointers of psycho-socio political reconditioning of the mind through words for civic activism. The ongoing democratic process in Nigeria is a useful site for language research. This study, therefore, could be a review of the Language of civic discourse in post-colonial Nigeria and could demonstrate that language proficiency and civic engagement to a large extent interrelate and are inextricably intertwined. The study would be beneficial to academic researchers, political analysts, observers, and students of the language. To future researchers, this study would provide baseline information on the language of civic discourse either with written or spoken discourse.

1.5 Limitation of the Study

The real impact of these letters is better assessed through the responses from the primary recipients. As usual, each of them responded by denying all allegations. The analysis of their responses is outside the scope of this study and therefore, not included. Also the perlocutionary effect of the locutionary act is not captured within the context of this study.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Civic Engagement: The Focus

Scholars use the term 'civic engagement' to refer to many different concepts, varying in terms of content attitudes, behaviors, intentions, and identity (Bogard & Sherrod, 2008; Syvertsen, A. K., Wray Lake, L., Flanagan, C. A., Osgood, D. W., & Briddell, L. 2011) and context (school-based or community-based; Lenzi et al., 2012; Yassin & Razak, 2018). Civic engagement could be complicated owing to the ways language is used in various contexts facilitated by civic skill. Civic skill is essential for political participation and has been observed to be one of the hallmarks of maturing democracies (Schlozman, K., Verba, S., & Brady, H. 2010, Zheni, T. 2020). The underlying assumption is that when citizens participate in meaningful ways, many problems can be pre-empted or solved before reaching an adversarial stage. Increasing civic engagement is a daunting task with real constraints. For example, civic engagement requires time and resources, but modern society pulls individuals in conflicting directions. Besides, many communities lack the social and political institutions needed to structure engagement, such as dialogic forums or community meetings. An approach to engagement that relies disproportionately upon citizens possessing ample time and resources risks favoring certain members of society over others. This encourages the dominance of extreme interests, outcomes that civic engagement seeks to avoid. Despite common agreement related to the importance of civic engagement, research on this concept remains ambiguous. This stems from the wide variance in definitions of civic engagement and its concomitant lack of indicators. For example, scholars and practitioners may not distinguish properly between contexts of participation where the common good may or may not be served. This is because they tend to focus on individuals' social relationships at the

expense of the wider groups. Civic engagement has become increasingly important for diverse stakeholders. However, what is less clear is whether those stakeholders have consensus around how to conceptualize, evaluate, or promote civic engagement among active participants.

2.2 Civic Engagement in Nigeria

When civil governance was restored in Nigeria, many Nigerians have confirmed that truly, democracy is different from a government by the butt and barrel of the guns. No matter how flawed the electoral process that produced a democratic government is or how weak the civil governance itself may appear, it is much better than an authoritarian regime Opeibi, (2012). Democracy and representative government depend on participation to ensure sound decision-making, popular support for programs and initiatives, and accountability when rights are violated. Individuals decide whether they want to participate, but everyone must have equal access to the opportunity to participate. While it may be stated that Nigeria has to some extent made some attempt to implement the principles of democracy, prevailing political situation and international reports on Nigeria is yet to support these efforts (Opeibi, 2012). The focus of civic engagement lays in building a stronger democracy, active participation in the electoral process, fair orientation in the electoral process. *In a democracy, leaders are elected to lighten the burden of the people, give them freedom, choice, and equity and ensure good governance and not to deceive them, burden them, oppress them, render them hopeless and helpless. Democracy must be held as sacrosanct* (Obasanjo, 2013). People can engage in civic processes for a variety of reasons, ranging from love and care for their community to feeling of efficacy and self-accomplishment after solving an important problem for the community.

Interest, motivation, and resources, such as time, money, skills, knowledge, information, social connections are among other important individual-level determinants that can affect civic participation. It has been acknowledged, that more educated and wealthier individuals are more likely to engage in civic actions than those less educated and less well-off (H.S. Baum, 2001). Such demographic characteristics as age and gender have also been found to be correlated with civic participation. It has been established, that people who have larger networks or 'ties' are more politically active than those with a smaller network (Son & Lin 2008). Individuals who seek to have continual relevance in the political space like Olusegun Obasanjo have utilized civic writings in reconditioning the psycho-socio thoughts of Nigerians, provoked civic activism and zestful interests in civic reforms through the deliberate use of language. Since power resides within the context of influence, Obasanjo utilizes his political prowess coupled with tactful language use to write to incumbent presidents and the citizens of Nigeria at large. This engagement would focus on national insecurity, corruption, the economy, nepotism, internal politics, gross misconduct; judicial harassment, etc. One can therefore argue that some of the criteria that situate Nigeria as part of the emerging democracies include the fragility and stability of her political system, her ability or inability to deliver democratic outcomes, the relative viability of the structure as well as the effectiveness of civic engagement among others.

2.3 Connection between Language and Civic Engagement

The art and act of civic engagement are predominantly embedded in language use; thus, necessitating a close examination of civic engagement discourses as in the case of this study. The subtle power of words in civic writings reveals such variables like activism, optimism, certainty, realism, and commonality. The point is that language is important for civic life. This is not, however, to say that structures of language have to be inherently or necessarily civic or that semantic aspects of language did not first evolve from socio-political needs. This is rather to assert as would be demonstrated in this research that language use has

effects, and civic engagement is very largely the use of language, even if the converse is not true (not every use of language is civic), however, it can be politically significant and exploited to achieve certain ends. The struggle for power, between those who seek to assert and maintain influence and those who seek to resist it rests on the paradigm of the social relevance of this work. It foregrounds the significance of society in the struggle for power vis-a-vis impact factor of language use.

The role of language in political discourse has been examined by scholars. Schlesinger (1974) dramatically notes, 'We infer the spirit of the nation in great measure from the language'. Incumbents and challengers also differ in the content of their language in the election context, with incumbents focusing more on optimism and commonality and challengers being more patriotic and ideological (Hart 2009). Context matters in how politicians speak: different types of political figures talk about different things. The effect of language in political discourse is of great significance. However, while this study focuses on the outcomes of political language, the psychological processes underlying these outcomes are beyond the focus of this research.

2.4 Civic Acts as Language Acts

All sorts of linguistic communication comprise linguistic actions. Speech is not all about speaking or writing but about the battle for the mind. Thus, language has power on the mind. Words woo the mind before the act. There is no action by man except through the evocative force of words. In the political sphere, leaders have used language to mobilize change and Nigeria is no exception. In civic writings, especially those intended to impact elections and political mandates; letters are crafted intentionally to sway the electorates to act in certain ways through carefully crafted but impactful intellectual discourse. This brings to the fore, the pragmatics of civic writings in a democratic state such as Nigeria. Pragmatics is seen as the study of language use in particular communicative contexts or situations of necessity, this would take cognizance of the message being communicated or the speech act being performed; the participants involved; their intention, knowledge of the world and the impact of these on their interactions; what they have taken for granted as part of the context; the deductions they make based on the context; what is implied by what is said or left unsaid; (Leech, 1983, p. 20).

According to Austin (1962) and Searle (1968), language performs actions called Speech Acts. SA performed by interlocutors has the purpose of establishing, maintaining, and developing the common ground. The main insight of speech act theory is that linguistic utterances do not just express propositions that are true or false but are acts that change the social reality in which we live. With speech acts, we can ask questions, make promises, give orders, express feelings, etc.

3. METHODOLOGY FRAMEWORK

This research relies solely on secondary data. Also, information relating to the topic under study was sourced from the internet. Relevant texts on language, civic engagement, civic pedagogy, and politics in Nigeria were also utilized. Primarily, the data were purposively sampled from three open letters to incumbent Presidents of Nigeria by Chief Olusegun Obasanjo.

3.1 Linguistic Approach

Pragmatics will serve as the linguistic approach for the study being one of the major fields in linguistic that could unravel meaning in language use. It is meant to provide an inroad into the study of Obasanjo's civic letters to incumbent Presidents in Nigeria. The origin of Pragmatics could be traced to the philosophy of language and the American

Philosophical School of Pragmatics. The discipline is an offshoot of Discourse Analysis and a sub-discipline in Linguistics. Thomas (1995) claims that the most common definitions of pragmatics are ‘meaning in use’ and ‘meaning in context’. This definition emphasizes the fact that Pragmatics as a field of study deals with the use of language concerning the users and interpreters. According to Yule (1996, p. 114), in semantic analysis, there is always an attempt to focus on what the words conventionally mean. Thus, Semantics studies the conventional meaning conveyed by the use of words, phrases, and sentences of a language. The difference, however, is that "while semantic analysis attempts to focus on what the words conventionally mean, the pragmatic analysis focuses on what a speaker might want the words to mean on a particular occasion" (Grundy, 2000 p.33).

3.2 Theoretical Approach

The linguistic framework of any linguistic research serves as the tool for the analysis of data. Hence, the theory of Speech Acts would serve as the spreadsheet for the analysis and evaluation of the sentences in the letters. The choice of Speech Acts theory as the linguistic framework for the study is premised on the notions that people perform various actions through the use of words and when utterances are made, a particular act is performed called Speech Acts. SA theory considers language as a sort of action rather than a medium to convey and express. It is a tool to interpret the meaning and function of words in different speech situations. It concerns itself with the symbolism of words; the difference between a meaningful string of words and meaningless ones; the truth value or falsity of utterances and the function to which language can be put.

Speech acts according to Austin (1962) fall into three classes, which are: locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts.

i. **Locutionary act:** This is the act of saying something. It has a meaning and it creates an understandable utterer to convey or express.

ii. **Illocutionary act:** This is performed as an act of saying something or an act as opposed to saying something. The illocutionary utterance has a certain force of its. It contains certain tones, attitudes, emotions, and feelings. The intention of the speaker/writer or others is also reflected in the illocutionary utterance.

iii. **Perlocutionary act:** This act normally creates a sense of consequential effects on the listeners/readers. The effect could be in the form of thoughts, imaginations, feelings, or emotions. The trademark of this act lies principally in the impact and effect on the addressee.

3.2.1 Types of Speech Act

Osaisanwo (2003:60) identifies performative verbs and constative verbs as the verbs that play noticeable roles in speech acts, where the performative verbs could be explicit or implicit and the constative verbs descriptive, ascriptive, retractive, assertive, disputative, responsive and suggestive, depending on the context. It should be noted sentences extracted from the letters which serve as the data source for this research work contain both direct and indirect performative verbs. This is because “utterances may express meanings explicitly and may include implicit meanings” (Zheni, T., 2020). Dada (2004) submits that illocutionary acts are the core of any theory of speech acts. The perlocutionary act is the effect or influence on the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the listener/reader, unlike locutionary acts. Perlocutionary acts could be inspiring, persuading, and consoling. It brings about an effect upon the beliefs and attitudes of its recipients. This aligns with Levinson (1980) which describes the perlocutionary act as the intended or unintended consequence of the speaker's utterance (cited in Adeyanju, 2009). Although scholars are yet to reach a consensus on the

types of speech acts there are and how to label them, however, for the sake of this research, it is grouped into five:

1. **Representative or Assertive:** Here, the speaker becomes committed to the truth of the propositional content. Examples include assertion, claim, description, hypothesis, conclusion, report, suggestion, prediction, as well as making a statement of facts.

2. **Directive:** Here, the speaker tries to get the hearer to act in such a way as to fulfill what is represented by the content of the proposition. Examples include questioning, commanding, requesting, pleading, admonishment, excuses, warning, instruction, order, inviting, etc.

3. **Commissive:** Here, the speaker becomes committed to acting in the way represented by the propositional content. An example includes promising, threatening, offering, guaranteeing, vowing, warning, betting, challenging, etc.

4. **Expressive:** Here the speaker expresses the sincerity and condition of the illocutionary act. Examples include apologizing, congratulating, thanking, appreciating, complaining, condoling, greeting, scolding, etc.

5. **Declarative:** Here, the speaker performs an action just representing him/herself as performing that action. Examples include baptizing, passing sentence, arresting, dismissing, resigning, accepting, declaring/declaration, marrying, etc. (Ndimele 1997: 127-149).

4.1 Data Presentation

The data for this study are letters of Olusegun Obasanjo to Goodluck Ebele Jonathan (immediate past president of Nigeria 2010-2014) and Muhammadu Buhari (President of Nigeria 2014-date). The choice of this data was motivated by the proficient language use and popularity of the letters. They are deliberately considered political discourse as they are purposely crafted to engage political stakeholders and transmitted both officially and publicly to serve civic functions. Each has approximately 38 (thirty-eight), 23 (twenty-three) and 29 (twenty-nine) number of paragraphs; 722 (seven hundred and twenty-two), 432 (four hundred and thirty-two) and 301 (three hundred and one) lines; as well as 13,718 (thirteen thousand, seven hundred and eighteen), 8,208 (eight thousand, two hundred and eight) and 4,515 (four thousand, five hundred and fifteen) words respectively. Thus, the analysis would be purely on the pragmatic features of data with their speech acts.

In pragmatics, particularly Speech Acts Theory, actions performed by words often depends on the speaker's intention, and the context in which they are uttered. Active engagers communicate a lot of intentions in their writings. They inform, inspire, assure, accuse, promise, direct, suggest, apologize, disagree, and criticize. This underscores the relevance of SATP to our data analysis. The application of the SATP allows for the examination of the linguistic features of the letters to inculcate meaning into the formal linguistic properties of the text.

The speech act types identified in the texts which serve as the data source for this research work further confirm that meanings ascribed to propositions in political discourse are based on context rather than content. This is necessary because of the social relevance of the circumstances under which they occur which cannot be duly captured when considered as isolated texts. Thus, the linguistic utterances in the letters are deliberately captured as performing actions in the texts. The centrality of speech acts theory to this research work lies in the fact that linguistic utterances do not only express the truth status of a proposition, rather they are acts that influence and impact the social reality of their environment. Beyond the medium of expression, sign, or symbol, language is thus considered a sort of tool for socio-political engagements, a weapon for driving change, and an embodiment of action.

4.2 Thematic outline

4.2.1 Thematic Outline of Obasanjo's letter to Jonathan (Letter A): *Before It Is Too Late (A Letter of Appeal)*

Outline of Obasanjo's 2013 letter to Jonathan can be topically and thematically divided into the following parts:

1. Ethnic factionalism (Ijaw nation).
2. National insecurity – militancy in the Niger Delta, kidnapping, heavy oil theft, alias bunkering and piracy, abductions and armed robberies, Boko haram crisis, etc.
3. High-level corruption
4. Gradual degeneration of the economy into dormancy, stagnation, and retrogression
5. Jonathan's legacy and undiscerned climb-down
6. Division of the country along weak seams of ethnicity and religion.
7. *Abacharism/Abachalitic* trend.

4.2.2 Thematic Outline of Obasanjo's letter to Buhari –I (Letter B): *The way out: A clarion call for coalition for Nigeria movement*

Outline of Obasanjo's 2018 letter to Buhari can be topically and thematically divided into the following parts:

1. Nepotism and clannishness
2. National insecurity – continual Boko haram crisis, herdsmen/farmers clash, etc.
3. Weakness in the knowledge and understanding of the economy
4. Poor understanding of the dynamics of internal politics
5. Status of health and age
6. Passing the buck, blame game and inability to accept responsibility
7. More divisions and inequality of the nation
8. Inability to bring discipline to bear on errant group members

4.2.3 Thematic Outline of Obasanjo's letter to Buhari –II (Letter C): *For the record: Points of concern and action*

Outline of Obasanjo's 2019 letter to Buhari can be topically and thematically divided into the following parts:

1. Skepticism on the integrity of INEC (Independent National Electoral Commission) and the ability to act creditably
2. Obscene display of executive recklessness and abuse of office by the vice president (Yemi Osinbajo)
3. *Abachalitic* trend (inflexible, insincere, unabashed desperation for power, self-succession project and intolerant)
4. Nepotism and distrust of non-ethnic allies
5. Harassment and intimidation of the judiciary (the case of Chief Justice Walter Samuel Nkanu Onnoghen)
6. Increased insecurity, Boko haram, kidnapping, and inactions
7. Buhari's incompetency/Claimed ignorance & pathological lies/inability to accept responsibility

The thematic outline of the three letters labeled A, B, and C above summarizes the discourse content of the letters. The concerns raised in forms of warnings, accusations, claims, allegations, appeals, and cautions borders on social issues which indicate disparity, political marginalization, and social imbalance. They also indicate such variables as activism, optimism, certainty, realism, and commonality.

4.2.4 Themmatization as Discourse Strategy in Civic Writings

Recurring themes such as national insecurity, high-level corruption, nepotism/factionalism, degenerating state of the nation's economy, and gross misconduct of political leaders further stretches the social relevance of the civic letters. These themes draw

up parallels and concerns that allows for cohesion, intertextuality and compactness in the letters. Since language is linked to social realities and can be manipulated as a social tool to facilitate change, Obasanjo strategically employs the usage of verbs to generate and facilitate certain actions from his readers. He consistently uses such verbs to make claims, complain, scold, challenge, warn, offer, pledge, request, conclude, appeal, admonish, excuse, plead, dismiss, declare, greet, announce, state, describe, vow, guarantee, complain, invite, incite, report, predict, hypothesize and declare.

4.2.5 The Pragmatics of we in Civic Discourse

We can collectively save ourselves from the position we find ourselves. It will not come through self-pity, fruitless complaint or protest but constructive and positive engagement and collective action for the good of our nation and ourselves and our children and their children. We need moral re-armament and engaging togetherness of people of like-mind and goodwill to come solidly together to lift Nigeria. If neither APC nor PDP is a worthy horse to ride at this crucial time, what then do we do? ... Farooq Kperogi, an Associate Professor at the Kennesaw State University, Georgia, United States, calls it 'a cruel Hobson's choice'; it's like a choice six and half of a dozen, between evil and evil. Any selection or deflection would be a distinction without a difference. We cannot just sit down lamenting and wringing our hands desperately and hopelessly. Where we are is a matter of choice but we can choose differently to make a necessary and desirable change, once again.

From the excerpts above, Olusegun Obasanjo demarcates the social group into *us vs they* dichotomy. He associates with the plight of the masses to reinforce the need for necessary action and to call for a change in the status quo of the nation for collective interest. He dwells on common ground to associate himself with the grievances of the masses. He does this extensively through the use of the first person plural pronoun- 'we'. Politicians often use the reader inclusive *we* to establish a sense of solidarity with their audience and influence certain political actions, especially during elections.

4.3 Speech Acts Features in the Data

Twenty sentences were extracted from each of the letters to give room for appropriate evaluation with the speech act types varying in frequency based on degree of occurrence in the letters. This variation informed the varied percentages generated for the study using mean deviation. Also, the selected sentences vary in length and structure. The variance is following Eka (2000:46), which states that "a simple sentence has one main clause and no subordinate clause. A compound sentence has two main clauses and no subordinate clause. A complex sentence has one main clause and at least one subordinate clause. Multiple sentences have at least three main clauses and no subordinate clause. A compound-complex sentence has two main clauses and at least one subordinate clause". The categorization of the utterances into speech act type of illocutionary force follows Searle's (1975) *Taxonomy of Illocutionary Acts*.

In the course of analysis, the three letters are labeled **A**, **B**, and **C**. The number of sentences in the extracted portion is sixty; therefore, we have **A** → 20, **B** → 20, and **C** → 20. This was done to make the analysis clear and easy to understand. Some of the excerpts would be captured below for illustration. The calculation of the percentages of the speech acts in a speech is made to make interpretation of the tables clear and empirical.

4.3.1 Directive

A1: *I wish to see no more bloodshed occasioned by politics in Nigeria. Please, Mr. President, be mindful of that.*

Illocutionary act: Directive (appeal).

A5: *Allegation of keeping over 1,000 people on political watch list rather than criminal or security watch list and training snipers and other armed personnel secretly and clandestinely acquiring weapons to match for political purposes like Abacha, and training them where Abacha trained his own killers, if it is true, cannot augur well for the initiator, the government and the people of Nigeria.*

Illocutionary act: Directive (warning).

A9: *I want nothing from you personally except that you should run the affairs of Nigeria not only to make Nigeria good, but to make Nigeria great for which I have always pleaded with you and I will always do so.*

Illocutionary act: Directive (request).

A11: *Let me appeal to those who have embarked on this dangerous road to reflect and desist from taking us on a perishable journey.*

Illocutionary act: Directive (appeal, warning).

A12: *As a leader, two things you must cherish and hold dear among others are trust and honour both of which are important ingredients of character.*

Illocutionary act: Directive (admonishing).

A13: *If you as leader of the Party cannot be seen to be loyal to the PDP in support of the candidates of the Party and the interests of such Party candidates have to be sacrificed on the altar of your personal and political interest, then good luck to the Party and I will also say as I have had occasions to say in the past, good luck to Goodluck.*

Illocutionary act: Directive (excuses, warning).

A15: *If PDP as a ruling Party collapses, it will be the first time in an independent Nigeria that a ruling political party would collapse not as a result of a military coup.*

Illocutionary act: Directive (warning).

A16: *You have already made history and please do nothing to mar history.*

Illocutionary act: Directive (admonishing, pleading).

A17: *My last piece of advice, Mr. President, is that you should learn the lesson of history and please do not take Nigeria and Nigerians for granted.*

Illocutionary act: Directive (admonishing, warning).

A18: *Nigerians are no fools, they can see, they can hear, they can talk among themselves, they can think, they can compare and they can act in the interest of their country and in their own self-interest.*

Illocutionary act: Directive (warning).

B9: *The situation that made Nigerians to vote massively to get my brother Jonathan off the horse is playing itself out again.*

Illocutionary act: Directive (warning)

B12: *Let nobody deceive us, economy feeds on politics and because our politics is depressing, our economy is even more depressing today.*

Illocutionary act: Directive (excuses, warning).

B13: *But whatever may be the state of President Buhari's health today, he should neither over-push his luck nor over-tax the patience and tolerance of Nigerians for him, no matter what his self-serving, so-called advisers, who would claim that they love him more than God loves him and that without him, there would be no Nigeria say.*

Illocutionary act: Directive (admonishing, warning).

B14: *He needs to have time to reflect, refurbish physically and recoup and after appropriate rest, once again, join the stock of Nigerian leaders whose experience, influence, wisdom and outreach can be deployed on the side line for the good of the country.*

Illocutionary act: Directive (admonishing, inviting).

B15: *I only appeal to brother Buhari to consider a deserved rest at this point in time and at this age.*

Illocutionary act: Directive (pleading/requesting).

B17: *We have only one choice left to take us out of Egypt to the promised land. And that is the coalition of the concerned and the willing – ready for positive and drastic change, progress and involvement.*

Illocutionary act: Directive (warning, inviting).

B18: *We must not continue to reinforce failure and hope that all will be well.*

Illocutionary act: Directive (admonishing, warning).

B 19: *For me, the strength and sustainable success of CN will derive largely from the strong commitment of a population that is constantly mobilized to the rallying platform of the fact that going forward together is our best option for building a nation that will occupy its deserved place in the global community.*

Illocutionary act: Directive (admonishing, inviting)

C1: *...there must be the redline that must not be crossed in tactics and practices of democracy...appropriate action must be taken not to allow our democracy to be derailed.*

Illocutionary Act: Directive (admonishing)

C2: *Nigeria must not be allowed to slip off the democratic path nor go into anarchy and ruin.*

Illocutionary act: Directive (warning)

C3: *This is a time for vigilance to fight to safeguard our votes and defend our democracy. The price of liberty and sustenance of our democracy is eternal vigilance and appropriate reaction to ward off iniquities*

Illocutionary act: Directive (inviting/inciting)

C4: *We must all be ready to pay that price and not relying on hollow words of callousness.*

Illocutionary act: Directive (inviting/inciting)

C5: *The Chairman of INEC must stand firm and carry out his duties with competence and unbending neutrality....Card readers must be used without fail and accreditation must be completed and number ascertained and made public before voting commences as was done in 2015.*

Illocutionary act: Directive (admonishing)

C6: *This is the time for preventive measures to be taken otherwise Nigeria may be....*

Illocutionary act: Directive (warning)

C7: *Nigerians must wake up and stop these acts of wanton desperation tantamount to mental incapacity to run the affairs of Nigeria wholesomely.*

Illocutionary act: Directive (inciting/inviting)

C8: *Today... Nigerians must rise up and do what they did... Nigerians must cry out to God to deliver Nigeria.*

Illocutionary act: Directive (inciting/inviting)

C9: *My final appeal to him is to desist from evil with manipulation and desperation*

Illocutionary act: Directive (admonishing)

C10: *All people who have registered to vote with their PVCs must never allow anybody or anything to deny or deprive them of the right of performing their fundamental civic duty of voting and sustaining democracy.*

Illocutionary act: Directive (admonishing)

C11: *No individual nor group has monopoly of violence or gangsterism. And we must not forget that in human interaction, reactions are normally greater than action, though opposite.*

Illocutionary act: Directive (warning)

Obasanjo uses instances and statistics to persuade his readers to reason logically with him. Statistics are statements of fact. They might not be entirely true but give numeric details about the subject of discourse. Also, the specification with place and time by Obasanjo portrays him as someone who is seemingly certain about his argument. He does this to

strategically market and de-market certain political authorities and ideas. For instance, besides pointing at the flaws of the ruling party, he further portrays them as politically impotent for desirable change. Thus, he incites the larger society to take their place in the actualization of his proposed route to the land of Canaan. Verbs like *appeal*, *plead*, *rise up*, *cry out*, *wake up*, *stop these*, and *stand firm* in the excerpt further strengthen the weight of Obasanjo's speech acts. Weaker obligations and softened commands were also used to mobilize actions.

4.3.2 Expressive

A2: *I came in company of Senator Amadu Ali to discuss the whole issue with you again, strangely, you denied ever requesting or authorising any President to talk to me.*

Illocutionary act: Expressive (complaining)

A3: *For you to allow yourself to be "possessed", so to say, to the exclusion of most of the rest of Nigerians as an 'Ijaw man' is a mistake that should never have been allowed to happen.*

Illocutionary act: Expressive (complaining/scolding).

B1: *Since we are still in the month of January, it is appropriate to wish all Nigerians Happy 2018.*

Illocutionary act: Expressive (greeting).

B10: *The herdsmen/crop farmers issue is being wittingly or unwittingly allowed to turn sour and messy.*

Illocutionary act: Expressive (complaining).

B11: *And it is a sad symptom of insensitivity and callousness that some Governors, a day after 73 victims were being buried in a mass grave in Benue State without condolence, were jubilantly endorsing President Buhari for a second term!*

Illocutionary act: Expressive (complaining, scolding).

C15: *I am concerned as a democrat who believes that with faithful and diligent practice of democracy, we can get over most of our political problems and move steadfastly and surefootedly on the course of stability, unity of purpose, socio-economic growth and progress for all.*

Illocutionary act: Expressive (complaining)

In the excerpt above, Obasanjo uses language to evoke pity in example and incite civic stakeholders. He believes he is being unjustly accused and betrayed. Also, he presents himself as having a wealth of experience reckoned with beyond the borders of Nigeria. By implication, his political counsels in the letters are not to be taken lightly. Also, he claims that he knows Buhari more closely than the average Nigerian. Thus, his judgement of the president transcends mere subjective perception and is not based on sentiments. He further expresses concern about the dilapidating status of the nation and lambasts political leaders for being insensitive and callous.

4.3.3 Commissive

A4: *Also declaring that one section of the country voted for you as if you got no votes from other sections can only be an unnecessary talk, to put it mildly.*

Illocutionary act: Commissive (challenging).

A6: *If I stuck out my neck and God used me and others as instrument to work hard for you to reach where you are today in what I considered the best political interest of Nigeria, tagging me as your enemy or the enemy of your administration by you, your kin or your aides can only be regarded as ridiculous to extreme.*

Illocutionary act: Commissive (challenging).

A7: *I personally have done two out of those three sacrifices and I am ready to do the third if it will serve the best interest of Nigerian dream.*

Illocutionary act: Commissive (offering).

A8: *I have done and I will continue to do and say what is first, in the best interest of Nigeria and second, what is in the best interest of the Party.*

Illocutionary act: Commissive (pledging).

B6: *Four years ago when my PDP card was torn, I made it abundantly clear that I quit partisan politics for aye but my concern and interest in Nigeria, Africa and indeed in humanity would not wane.*

Illocutionary act: Commissive (offering, vowing).

B7: *I will consider no sacrifice too great to make for the good of Nigeria at any time.*

Illocutionary act: Commissive (offering, vowing).

B8: *But if at any stage the Movement wishes to metamorphose into candidate-sponsoring Movement for elections, I will bow out of the Movement because I will continue to maintain my non-partisan position.*

Illocutionary act: Commissive (promising, guaranteeing).

C18: *Here again, I have been threatened with arrest and extermination but I will not succumb to intimidation or threats.*

Illocutionary act: Commissive (challenging)

C19: *Maybe I should remind those who are using probe as a threat that I have been probed four times by EFCC, ICPC, House of Representatives and the Senate and Buhari has access to reports of these probes. But I have also challenged Buhari and the criminals around him to set up a probe on the same allegations and I will face such probe in public.*

Illocutionary act: Commissive (challenging)

The speaker uses the personal pronoun *I* to draw attention to self. The relevance of personal pronoun in this discourse largely suggests Obasanjo's willingness and sacrifice for the good of the nation. This confirms the claim of Zheni (2020) that personal pronoun in political discourse is used for self-focus and to draw attention to the proposition of the speaker.

4.3.4 Assertive

A10: *I have come to the conclusion painfully or happily that if you can shun yourself to a great extent of personal and political interests and dwell more on the national interest and also draw the line between advice from selfish and self-centered aides and advice from those who in the interest of the nation may not tell you what you will want to hear, it will be well.*

Illocutionary act: Assertive (conclusion).

A14: *The Chairman is playing the tune dictated by the Paymaster.*

Illocutionary act: Assertive (claiming).

B2: *No doubt, our situation in the last decade or so had shown that we are not good enough at home; hence we are invariably absent at the table that we should be abroad.*

Illocutionary act: Assertive (stating, announcing).

B3: *I knew President Buhari before he became President and said that he is weak in the knowledge and understanding of the economy but I thought that he could make use of good Nigerians in that area that could help.*

Illocutionary act: Assertive (claiming, describing).

B4: *I know that you cannot give what you don't have and that economy does not obey military order.*

Illocutionary act: Assertive (stating, conclusion).

B5: *God of Nigeria has endowed this country adequately and our non-performance cannot be blamed on God but on leadership.*

Illocutionary act: Assertive (claiming, conclusion).

B16: *What has emerged from the opposition has shown no better promise from their antecedents.*

Illocutionary act: Assertive (claiming, concluding).

C12: *Amina Zakari has become too controversial a figure to be able to give assurance of free, fair and credible election for INEC. President Buhari and her family have declared that there is no blood relationship but there is relationship through marriage.*

Illocutionary act: Assertive (claim/statement of fact/report)

C13: *We are all unsafe and insecure.....Boko Haram is stronger today militarily than they have ever been.*

Illocutionary act: Assertive (claiming/reporting)

C14: *Boko Haram is stronger today militarily than they have ever been. Boko Haram has also been empowered by the Nigerian government through payment of ransom of millions of dollars which each administration disingenuously always denies. With ISIS being liquidated in Iraq and Syria, Africa is now their port of concentration. Soon, they may take over Libya which, with substantial resources, is almost a totally failed state. When that happens, all African countries North of Congo River will be unsafe with serious security problems. The struggle must be for all West African, Central African, North African and most East African States.*

Illocutionary act: Assertive (claiming/reporting)

C16: *Bola Tinubu's statement about Muhammadu Buhari in 2003 is fairly prophetic, "Muhammadu Buhari is an agent of destabilisation, ethnic bigot and religious fanatic who, if given the chance, would ensure the disintegration of the country. His ethnocentrism would jeopardise Nigeria's national unity.*

Illocutionary act: Assertive (prediction/hypothesis)

C20: *From what we saw and knew about Osun State gubernatorial election, what was conclusive was declared inconclusive despite all advice to the contrary.*

Illocutionary act: Assertive (reporting/concluding)

Assertive speech acts in political discourse are not objective because the speakers may express their personal attitudes and beliefs, and present them as self-evident truths (Chilton, 2004, p. 49).

Obasanjo reports, makes claims and concludes on the basis of his perception which may not necessarily be the view of other stakeholders.

4.3.5 Declaration

A19: *May it never be the wish of majority of Nigerians that Goodluck Jonathan, by his acts of omission or commission, would be the first and the last Nigerian President ever to come from Ijaw tribe.*

Illocutionary act: Declaration (dismissing).

A20: *Amaechi, whether he likes it or not, will cease to be governor over Rivers State, which Port Harcourt is part by the end of May 2015.*

Illocutionary act: Declaration (declaring).

B20: *I will see him as a partner in playing such a role nationally and internationally, but not as a horse rider in Nigeria again.*

Illocutionary Act: Declaration (dismissing)

C17: *Today, another Abacha Era is here.*

Illocutionary act: Declaration (declaring)

In the case of declarations, the speaker does not perform an action but reports or announces a real action or event in a real world. Obasanjo deploys this speech act to tag, dismiss and declare verdict on certain political issues.

4.4 Data Presentation

4.4.1 Table 1: Illocutionary Acts/Frequency Percentage -Letter A

Illocutionary Acts	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Commissive	4	20 %
Assertive	2	10 %
Directive	10	50 %
Declarative	2	10 %
Expressive	2	10 %

4.4.2 Table 2: Illocutionary Acts/Frequency Percentage - Letter B

Illocutionary Acts	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Commissive	3	15 %
Assertive	5	25 %
Directive	8	40 %
Declarative	1	5 %
Expressive	3	15 %

4.4.3 Table 3: Illocutionary Acts/Frequency Percentage - Letter C

Illocutionary Acts	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Commissive	2	10 %
Assertive	5	25 %
Directive	11	55 %
Declarative	1	5 %
Expressive	1	5 %

4.4.4 Table 4: Summary of Tables 1, 2 and 3 (Letter A, B and C)

Illocutionary Acts	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Commissive	9	15 %
Assertive	12	20 %
Directive	29	48.3 %
Declarative	4	6.7 %
Expressive	6	10%

4.4.5 Speech Acts Functions and Frequency in Letters A, B & C

SA/FU	FQ	SA/FU	FQ	SA/FU	FQ	SA/FU	FQ	SA/FU	FQ
Directive		Expressive		Commissive		Assertive		Declarative	
AP	1	CP	3	CH	4	CN	1	DC	2
WN	7	CP/SC	2	OF	1	CL	1	DM	2
RQ	1	GR	1	PG	1	ST/AN	1		
AD	5			OF/VW	2	CL/DS	1		
AP/WN	1			PR/GU	1	ST/CN	1		
EX/WN	2					CL/CN	2		
AD/WN	3					CL/SF	1		
AD/PL	1					CL/CP	2		
AD/IN	1					PR/HP	1		
PL/RQ	2					RP/CN	1		
WN/IV	1								
AD/IV	1								
IV/IC	3								
	29		6		9		12		4

Speech Acts=SA; FU=Function; Frequency=FQ; Appeal=AP; Warning=WN; Request=RQ; Admonishing=AD; Excuses=EX; Admonishing =AD; Pleading=PL; Inviting=IV; Inciting=IC; Complaining=CP; Scolding=SC; Greeting=GR; Concluding=CN; Claiming=CL; Stating=ST; Announcing=AN; Describing=DS; Statement of fact=SF; Reporting=RP; Prediction=PR; Hypothesis=HP; Declaring=DC; Dismissing=DM; Challenging=CH; OF=Offering; Pledging=PG; Vowing=VW; Promising=PR; GU=Guaranteeing

4.5 Interpretation of Data

From table 4.4.1, it is observed that Obasanjo employed more directive acts in his letter to Jonathan as it has a frequency of 50%. Commissive was 20% while assertive, declarative, and expressive sentences were 10% each. In his first letter to Buhari, represented in table 4.4.2, Obasanjo did not shift his forceful position claiming a total of 40% directive acts, commissive and expressive acts were 15% each, declarative was 5% while the assertive act was significantly 25%. However, in his second letter to Buhari, commissive reduced to 10%, assertive remained 25%, directive increased significantly to 55%, declarative remained 5% while expressive reduced substantially to 5%. A comparative analysis of tables 4.4.2 & 4.4.3 suggests that Obasanjo re-strategize on the language used for effect in his letters to Buhari which is made evident in his reduction of expressive structures and increase in directive acts. Table 4.4.4 shows the cumulative frequency of the illocutionary acts. 48.3% are directives, 20%, are assertive acts, commissive has 15%, expressive 10%, and declarative 6.7%. Table 4.4.5 further explains the functions of the speech acts in the study. Obasanjo uses directive act extensively in his letters. His socio-political influence as an elder statesman and self-delegated oversight function confers on him such unapologetic force to warn, admonish, invite and incite. He also uses the expressive act moderately to complain and scold his successors. He laments and decries the rampaging ethnic factionalism, the herdsmen/crop farmers' issue which is being wittingly or unwittingly allowed to turn sour and messy; and the sad symptom of insensitivity and callousness by the government. Also, the usage of commissive act to challenge, offer, pledge, and vow is very pertinent in the study. Obasanjo presents himself as a voluntary servant with the responsibility of seeking the socio-political good of the nation. He as well massively deployed the assertive act to state, claim, predict and report. His hypothesis draws from his claim of vast knowledge of the socio-political status of the nation. He rides on his expertise and experience as a former military and political leader to make certain claims and hypothesize. The prominence of declarative act to declare and dismiss is rather shallow in Obasanjo's letters. This could be because he is being careful not to stir up negative outcomes or undermine the existing democracy through his letters.

The analysis above demonstrates that Obasanjo relies more on directive acts in his civic letters to incumbent presidents. Directives are orders, commands, warnings, suggestions, requests, invitations, promises, threats, questions, pleadings, admonishments, excuses, warnings, instructions, etc. They are performed by the speaker or writer to get the hearer or reader to act in such a way as to fulfill what is represented by the content of the proposition. By using directive acts, the writer undertakes to influence the readers to take certain actions at certain times. However, in the overall, it is observed that directive, assertive, and commissive speech acts are identified more than other types of speech acts in the letters.

Summarily, from the content of the letters, Obasanjo positions himself as an elder statesman who is committed to civic sanity as opposed to party politics. He demonstrates his commitment to political truth through the employment of assertive act which rates 20% in the cumulative. He further utilizes his political depth to admonish, plead and warn both the elect and electorate to govern and rebuild the nation-Nigeria in line with best democratic practices as evident in his thematic viewpoints on figure 4.2.1, 4.2.2 and 4.2.3. It is also observed that

Obasanjo sparingly used declarative acts. He technically evades the use of direct pronouns while making these declarations so as not to abuse the rule of law. This is because making such public declarations on political affairs is technically unconstitutional and could evoke sympathy from supporters of the figure affected to cause political unrest. Also, Obasanjo made use of fewer assertive acts in his letter to Jonathan when compared to Buhari's. This could be because of the perceived knowledge of the personalities of both leaders. While Jonathan has no militaristic toughness, Buhari does in act and style.

5.1 CONCLUSION

This study has examined selected sentences in Obasanjo's letters to two Nigeria presidents as pieces of discourse. It also validates the claim that words perform actions (speech acts theory) and that meanings of utterances are context-based (pragmatics). The researcher has been able to identify speech acts features of the selected sentences from the letters and has been able to analyze the features concerning the context in which the letters were presented. Findings from the study indicate that language use in civic engagement is highly embedded with admonitions, appeals, and warnings. Also, while civic engagement drivers could, on the one hand, utilize language to influence positive political decisions through a tactical presentation of political views, chances are that they could capitalize on the psyche of the disillusioned citizens to ignite sparks of divergent reasoning which could negatively impact the nation's democracy.

5.2 Recommendations

This research work has demonstrated the relevance of language in civic engagement and how the force of words performs actions in political discourse. Though linguistically neutral, yet words could be manipulated to stir actions in certain ways. Since language in civic engagement is highly authoritative, inspiring, admonishing, and appealing, this work recommends that every aspiring civic engagement driver proficiently use language for the promotion of good governance and enhancing democracy. Also, civic activists should be politically sound, vast, experienced, and knowledgeable to understand, interpret, and analyze actions and inactions of the government. Furthermore, allegations should be based on facts and not sentiments or assumptions so as not to threaten the democracy we claim to protect.

For future research, other aspects such as responses from the primary recipients of the letters could be studied to measure the real impact of the letters. Also the perlocutionary effects could be evaluated to ascertain the reception, disposition and attention paid to civic letters in the pursuance of good governance and democracy.

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